



Indiana State Department of Health

Epidemiology Resource Center

Quick Facts

About...Mycoplasma pneumonia

What is Mycoplasma pneumonia?

Mycoplasma infection is respiratory illness caused by bacteria called *Mycoplasma pneumonia*.

How is Mycoplasma pneumonia spread?

Mycoplasma is spread through contact with droplets from the nose and throat of infected people especially when they cough and sneeze. Transmission is thought to require prolonged close contact with an infected person. Spread in families, schools and institutions occurs slowly. The contagious period is probably fewer than 10 days and occasionally longer. Diagnosis of acute infections remains difficult; therefore, early recognition of outbreaks has been problematic. The biggest challenge is to prevent secondary cases in outbreaks by prompt initiation of control measures.

Who is at risk for Mycoplasma pneumonia?

Persons of all ages are at risk but rarely children less than 5 years old. It is the leading cause of pneumonia in school-age children and young adults. Outbreaks can occur especially in crowded military and institutional (e.g., college) settings. Outbreaks in these settings can last several months

How do I know if I have Mycoplasma pneumonia?

Mycoplasma infection is usually diagnosed on the basis of typical symptoms. A nonspecific blood test (cold agglutinins) is helpful in definitive diagnosis, but is not always positive. The use of more specific laboratory tests is often limited to special outbreak investigations.

What are the symptoms of Mycoplasma pneumonia?

Symptoms include fever, cough, bronchitis, sore throat, headache, and tiredness. A common result of mycoplasma infection is pneumonia (sometimes called "walking pneumonia" because it is usually mild and rarely requires hospitalization). Infections of the middle ear (otitis media) also can result. Symptoms may persist for a few days to more than a month. Symptoms generally begin 15 to 25 days after exposure. The symptoms generally develop slowly, over a period of two to four days. It may lead to bronchitis with fever and nonproductive cough and X-ray confirmed pneumonia develops in 5-10% of cases.

How is Mycoplasma pneumonia treated?

Antibiotics such as erythromycin, clarithromycin, or azithromycin are effective treatment. However, because mycoplasma infection usually resolves on its own, antibiotic treatment of mild symptoms is not always necessary.

How is Mycoplasma pneumonia prevented?

At this time, there are no vaccines for the prevention of mycoplasma infection and there are no effective measures for control. As with any respiratory disease, all people should cover their face when coughing or sneezing, and wash their hands frequently.

All information presented is intended for public use. For more information, please refer to the Diseases and Control Prevention (CDC) website:
http://www.cdc.gov/ncidod/dbmd/diseaseinfo/mycoplasmapneum_t.htm

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